

Construction Permit Tips For Homeowners

Frequently asked questions about permits for homeowners

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Remodeling or adding improvements to your home or property?

Homeowners thinking about remodeling their home or adding other improvements, such as decks, roofs, garage, or retaining walls, often have questions about building permits.

Business Hours: M – F 8:00 a.m. to 5 p.m. ♦ Permit Processing Hours: M – F 8 a.m. to 4:00 p.m.

Note: This handout is for informational use only and is not to be substituted for the Shoreline Development Code.

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The information contained here is designed to help homeowners know when construction permits and other approvals are required by the City of Shoreline. It also answers some of the most frequently asked questions and offers tips from the City.

Since each construction project is unique, we invite you to call the City's information line, (206) 801-2500, for answers to your specific questions.

You can also e-mail us at pcd@shorelinewa.gov.

What are permits and why do I need one?

Permits are the way the City of Shoreline makes sure all construction or improvement projects meet the applicable rules and regulations. The process is designed to ensure all construction in the City is done properly for the safety of building occupants. In addition to Shoreline codes, there are other federal, state, and local laws that govern construction. A comprehensive list is available <http://shorelinewa.gov/codes>.

There are several different types of permits, based on the type of construction: structural, plumbing, mechanical, right-of-way (driveway), and electrical. Most homeowner projects require a combination of permits. In addition, the complete demolition and relocation of buildings also requires permits.

Obtaining the permit is not the first step in the process. First, you will want to thoroughly define the project to determine the type of process that may be used to evaluate the proposal. Based on the scope of work, you may need to prepare plans to submit, draw a site plan for your property showing the improvements, and show the type of construction you will be using. The City has [Development Handouts](#) to help you through this process.

Once plans are approved, you are required to build the project to those plans. If any changes are made to the plans, they must be made with the City's approval through the revision submittal process.

The second half of the process is the inspection of the work. More about that later.

When don't I need a permit?

A construction permit is not needed for items such as: wallpapering, painting or similar finish work; fences six feet high or lower; platforms, decks and walks 30 inches high or less above grade or not over basement; and in several other cases. For specific exceptions review the [Permit Exemptions](#) handout. However, reviews may be required from other agencies; be sure to check with us before building.

Replacement or repair of some fixtures, such as changing water faucets or replacing switches, does not normally require a permit. Replacing a water heater or adding a new permanently wired light fixture does require a permit.

If you are unsure if you need a permit or not and cannot find the answer on the exceptions handouts, please call (206) 801-2500 or email pcd@shorelinewa.gov.

When do I need a construction permit?

A construction permit is needed for all new construction. If you are just repairing or replacing fixtures, such as replacing windows, you will most likely not need a permit. However, if you are making additions or changes to an existing system, such as plumbing or wiring, you may need a plumbing, electrical, or mechanical permit. For example, moving or adding an electrical outlet requires a permit.

To find out if your project needs a permit, review the [Permit Exemptions](#) handout, call (206) 801-2500, or email pcd@shorelinewa.gov.

Where do I get a permit?

Construction permits are issued at the City's Permit Services Center in City Hall, 17500 Midvale Avenue N. We are open 8:00 a.m. to 5:00 p.m. Application processing hours are 8:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Monday through Friday. You can also call (206) 801-2500 for more information or email pcd@shorelinewa.gov.

If you only need simple permits for minor work, such as installing a water heater, permit applications may be submitted electronically. To find out if you can submit your permit electronically, review the [Electronic Applications](#) handout.

How long does it take to get a permit?

Permit issuance periods vary. Some projects can be fully permitted over-the-counter, as an express permit meaning a return trip may not be necessary. However, some projects require you to leave your plans for additional review. Review the [Express Permit-Residential](#) for information on express permitting.

What should I know about zoning?

Zoning identifies, within a defined area, the height of buildings, how much building and hardscape (man-made surface) coverage is permitted, minimum lot sizes, and front, rear, and side-yard setbacks (the area between a structure and a property line or protected area). For example, a residential area may be zoned R-6 with the general parameters listed below.

Base Density: Dwelling Units/Acre	Min. Density	Min. Lot Width	Min. Lot Area	Min Front Yard Setback	Min. Rear Yard Setback	Min. Side Yard Setback	Base Height	Max. Building Coverage	Max. Hardscape
6 du/ac	4 du/ac	50 ft	7,200 sq ft	20 ft	15 ft	5 ft min. and 15 ft total sum of two	30 ft (25 ft with pitched roof)	35%	50%

Some questions and approvals for zoning can be provided over-the-counter by the staff reviewing your building plans.

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There are many land use requirements within the City, such as whether an area is for residential or commercial use. Understanding how your property is zoned is important to understand before you start any major work on your property. We can answer questions about these requirements. To request information you can contact us at pcd@shorelinewa.gov or call (206) 801-2500.

What about other approvals or permits?

Other government agencies may need to review and approve your project. The City will inform you of these reviews at the time plans are submitted and they may be outlined in the submittal checklists. You can also review the [Plan Review](#) handout to see what other agencies may be involved.

What if I don't get a permit?

Failure to obtain a permit before construction begins is a violation of the City's codes and regulations and could subject you to fines and penalties. You'll be required to obtain permits for the work and it must pass inspection, or you must return the structure or site to its original condition. Permit fees may be doubled as a penalty.

Construction codes were created for safety reasons. Work built without a permit can be unsafe, no matter how good it looks.

Who should obtain the permit?

It is the responsibility of the property owner to make sure all proper permits are obtained. However, contractors licensed by the State of Washington or your agent can obtain the permits on your behalf.

Can I apply for a permit for my mother, aunt, or a friend?

Yes. To obtain a permit for someone else, you will be acting as their agent and an authorization letter may be needed.

Can I do the work myself or do I have to hire a contractor?

You can do the work yourself; however, you must follow the same codes and regulations as a contractor would. Such requirements include:

- **Build to the plans:** Be sure to follow your approved plans, whether they are drawn by an architect or designer or are standard construction requirements given to you by the city. If you change the plans while building the structure, problems may arise when the project is inspected. If you do decide to make changes, check with the City's plan review staff or your field inspector. For most building design changes, the revision re-submittal process will need to be followed.
- **Calling for inspection:** You must call for inspections as required by your permit as the work is completed. Failure to obtain the proper inspection can delay the completion of your project.

- **Obtaining final approval:** Once the construction is completed, you must seek final approval.

What do I need to know about hiring a contractor?

The City recommends that you deal only with a contractor licensed by the State of Washington. Visit the Department of Labor and Industries website at <https://fortress.wa.gov/lni/bbip/> to search for licensed contractors or contact them at (425) 990-1400. If you plan on hiring a contractor, please see Washington State's [Hiring a Contractor](#) brochure.

Who draws up the plans?

Plans for projects such as room additions can usually be drawn up by qualified individuals such as a draftsman or by the homeowner. Other projects may require plans prepared and signed by an architect or engineer licensed by the State of Washington. Please contact our office for more information regarding hiring a design professional for your project.

For routine projects such as demolition, re-roofing, and driveway, the City has [standard specifications](#) that can be followed within certain limitations. Those specifications, together with a site plan showing your project, are accepted by the department as plans.

In addition, some kit-type projects for sunrooms or sheds come with construction plans. Before you buy, call (206) 801-2500 or email pcd@shorelinewa.gov to make sure your kit is accepted.

What about inspections?

It is the homeowner's responsibility to insure that inspections are requested and obtained at specific times during construction. You may have your contractor make the call, but it is still the homeowner's responsibility to make sure the inspections are made. Inspections are made during certain points in the project, depending on the work that's being performed. For example, inspections of foundation footings need to be made after forms are set and steel placed but before pouring concrete.

Remember, the project is not complete for legal purposes until it has passed the final inspection. For more information, review the [Inspection Summary](#) handout.

What if I have a permit but never called for an inspection?

Generally, permits expire after 180 days if no inspections have been made. In order for the project to be complete, it must pass final inspection. If a permit expires before final inspection, the project is in violation of City codes. If you would like help reactivating your permit or applying for another one, please call us at (206) 801-2521. We will try to help with as little inconvenience as possible. Our interest is in seeing your project complete, including the final inspection. Once the permit has been reactivated or a new one has been issued, call (206) 801-2545 to request a final inspection.

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Am I required to have an inspection?

Yes. All permits require inspections. The project is not legally complete until it passes the final inspection.

How do I schedule an inspection?

Once you have received your permit approval, you can request an inspection by calling our Inspection Line at (206) 801-2545 or going to [Inspection](#) to schedule one online. For general inspection questions, call (206) 801-2500.

What are mechanical and plumbing permits?

Mechanical and plumbing permits are authorizations to repair or construct a mechanical and/or plumbing system. Permitted work must comply with the adopted code. Inspections are required for both permits.

Examples of work requiring a plumbing permit include addition, installation, or replacement of any plumbing fixture, such as water heaters, sinks, and water softeners.

Examples of work requiring a mechanical permit include adding or replacing a furnace (wall or floor), heaters, air conditioners, appliance vents for chimneys, refrigerator compressors, boilers, chillers, fan coil units, heat pumps, air handlers, duct work, vent fans and systems, and exhaust hoods and ducts.

What is an electrical permit?

An electrical permit is an authorization to repair or construct an electrical system. The permits are available from [the Department of Labor and Industries](#).

Permitted work must be in compliance with the adopted edition of the electrical code. An inspection is required for each permit and performed by the Department of Labor and Industries.

Examples of work requiring an electrical permit include installation of new electrical outlets, moving electrical outlets or switches, adding or replacing circuits, adding or replacing phase services, installing a temporary power pole, or adding new "hard wired" electrical appliances or fixtures.

How long does it take to process a simple permit?

Our goal is to process simple permits such as plumbing and mechanical as they are received daily. During high-volume periods, processing requests may take up to three business days, but the turn-around time is generally faster. Invalid or incorrect information on the request will cause delay. Applications for walk-in customers will be processed while you wait.

What credit cards can I use?

The City only accepts MasterCard and Visa.

When does my permit expire?

Work must begin and an inspection made within 180 days, otherwise the permit expires. Every time you pass an inspection your permit is extended for another 180 days from the date of the passed inspection.

How do I check to see if a contractor is in good standing?

The Washington State Department of Labor and Industries licenses contractors in Washington State. You can check to see if a contractor is in good standing by visiting <https://secure.lni.wa.gov/> The City will not issue a permit to unlicensed contractors or a contractor with an expired license.

What codes does the City use?

The City has adopted or amended several codes that effect development. Our [Standards and Regulations](#) development handout provides a comprehensive list of the codes and ordinances.

Where can I find out more about permits and developing?

For more information on obtaining permits or the development process visit us at City Hall, 17500 Midvale Avenue N., Planning & Community Development department or checkout our website at <http://shorelinewa.gov/planning>.

Are there construction hours in Shoreline?

The City does not specifically regulate the hours during which construction can occur. What the City does regulate is the sounds emitted by construction activity. Noise and sounds originating from construction sites is considered a public nuisance. The sounds include sounds from construction equipment, power tools, and hammering. To minimize the impact the City has limited the timeframe when the sounds can be generated to between the hours of 10:00 p.m. and 7:00 a.m. on weekdays and 10:00 p.m. and 9:00 a.m. on weekends. Complaints regarding noise outside of these hours should be filed with the Police Department.

How can I check the status of my permit or find out about other permits in my area?

Information on specific permits or addresses can be reviewed using our [Permit Search Tool](#)

Should you have any other questions, please call us at (206) 801-2500 or email pcd@shorelinewa.gov.

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